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# THE VIEWS OF AN ANGRY MAN

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FAITHFULLY REPORTED
BY G. S. STREET

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# THE VIEWS OF AN ANGRY MAN

*BOOKS BY G. S. STREET*

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BOY
THE WISE AND THE WAYWARD
THE TRIALS OF THE BANTOCKS
A BOOK OF STORIES
A BOOK OF ESSAYS

# THE VIEWS OF AN ANGRY MAN

FAITHFULLY REPORTED

BY

G. S. STREET

LONDON
A. H. BULLEN
18 CECIL COURT, ST. MARTIN'S LANE, W.C.
1902

828
S9154vi

# PREFACE

"For God's sake, reader, take them not for mine."—BYRON.

I WAS living alone in the country last summer, and was favoured with the occasional visits of an acquaintance. He would arrive, as a rule, with his mind full of some subject on which he had been meditating, and would give me the benefit of his reflections. Lacking other subjects for my pen, I was accustomed to make notes afterwards of his conversation. These notes I have reproduced at his request. He himself, I regret to say, is serving a term of imprisonment for a violent assault on an optimist, and is therefore constrained to make me the mouthpiece of his views, not to deprive the world of them. I have kept (so far

as possible) to his own diction, and have added (it will be seen) no literary elegancies or ornaments. The notes were sent in the first place to the *Westminster Gazette*. I should like to correct my friend's views with my own brighter opinions, but am unwilling to irritate him in his adversity. He will be at large before very long.

G. S. S.

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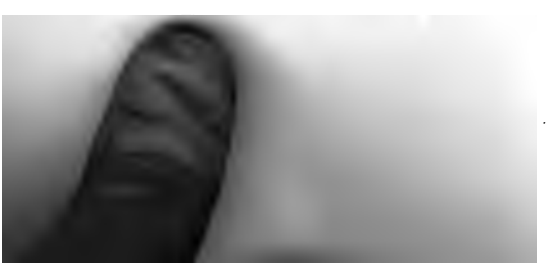
# I

# OUR FELLOW-CREATURES



# I

## OUR FELLOW-CREATURES

I ASSURE you I have made an honest effort to like them, but I simply can't. I detest them. I speak of my fellow-creatures in the widest sense, the men and women who, unknown to one individually, are always surrounding one and intruding on one here, there, and everywhere. It is no use telling me that my experiences have been unfortunate. That may be so in the case of my friends; perhaps my friends *are* an unusually horrid set of people. But I am dealing now with general humanity as it affects

oneself, and my experiences of it cannot be much worse than those of any other average poor Englishman. Rich men receive a happier impression of it, I do not doubt, though by their own account they are always being soured by ingratitude, by the mercenary attitude adopted towards them, and all that. The fools expect too much. Now, I expect no positive virtues at all: if my fellow-creatures were only inoffensive I should be quite content. They are not; they are *most* offensive, and I see no reason why I should not tell them so.

Then you will tell me I have never tried to understand them. You lie. I have tried all my life to be conciliatory and sympathetic with them, and I have studied their habits and modes of thought until repulsion absolutely compelled me

to desist. Of course there are exceptions; nice clean children are all very well, and I have no objection to watching agricultural labourers at their work in the open air. But the fellow-creatures one ordinarily sees about, and sees close, in trains and omnibuses, in the theatre, at hotels, and so forth—they are dreadful. They are all more or less of the great English middle class, of course, but I will not suppose that they are worse than other people; I take them merely as fellow-creatures. I will be concrete, if you like. The last time I went from my country abode to London I took my place in a third-class railway carriage. There were seven men in it beside myself. Six of them smoked tobacco which had a smell compared with which the stinkpots of the Chinese — the simile is well

known. Four of them ate sandwiches in a most aggressive and disgusting manner. All seven (you would have it) spat incessantly. I changed into a non-smoking carriage: a crying baby and two shrill argumentative women with a very unpleasing accent. This is all trite, I know, but what an indictment is the very triteness of it! I then went into a first-class smoking-carriage, sacrificing my lunch to pay the exorbitant difference. There was only one old man in it, and I thought I was safe. Well, this old man, at intervals of forty-five seconds, gave a sudden, gasping kind of snort, of the kind that accompanies apoplectic fits. Taking a mean advantage of the fact that I did not throw him out of the window, he started a disquisition on politics, still snorting at regular intervals. He knew no more of

politics than a baby. Of course you say, prig that you are, that it was an opportunity for studying the average mind. But what is the use of studying muddled repetitions of leading articles? They are not what you call stimulating in their original form. Arrived in London, I went to a concert, a good one, and of the fellow-creatures in my neighbourhood two coughed without stopping, and one cleared his throat in a complicated fashion of unimaginable horror. How could I enjoy the music?

I find that as a rule one's fellow-creatures resent the least approach to amenity of manner. They probably think one wants to make their confounded acquaintance, and are afraid one may not be their social equal. I was staying some while since in an out-of-the-way country hotel,

and there were two other visitors, a man and woman. Standing outside the door I saw the man, a red-faced, bloated man, swaggering in (for the place) inappropriately fine clothes. I said good-morning. He looked at my rather threadbare attire —I think my stockings had a hole—and simply snarled at me. When I saw the woman afterwards she at once turned her back, determined I should not say good-morning to *her*. Dear fellow-creatures! English? I'm afraid it is, but you can't expect me to expatriate myself, and you still insist I should love my fellow-creatures.

Take a little dive into the philosophy of it. Man was originally a solitary animal and became gregarious not from love of his kind but for mutual defence and aggression. His gregarious record is

a long catalogue of the strong preying on the weak, of cruelty, treachery, unkindness. It is quite natural, then, that most men should remain suspicious and brutal, and resent the approaches of sunny-hearted people like myself. I am not a misanthropist at all. I merely sigh over the unpleasantness of my fellow-creatures —that is to say, I should merely sigh if I were not obliged to meet them. As it is, there are times when I could massacre the whole lot of them.

# II

# CIVILIZATION

## II

### CIVILIZATION

IT is possible that the Babylonian civilization was all right, and I have nothing to say against the civilization of ancient Egypt. I am anxious not to be unjustly comprehensive. In spite of Plato we know too little of the Athenian civilization to be very dogmatic about it, and though that of the Roman Empire had its extremely shady side, it is hardly worth while to rake it up. I will even admit that what was called civilization in France and England during the eighteenth century had its good points. Moreover,

to come to our own time, I believe there is some evidence for the proposition that Chinese civilization makes for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It is our contemporary Western civilization that makes me angry. Here it is; we were born into it; we are obliged to go on with it. But what is the use of pretending that it is a good thing? Why keep up the farce? Nobody but our iniquitous capitalists and the inventors of our very much over-praised mechanical toys—steam-engines, and telegraphs, and the rest of them—really believe in it. We *know* it is a sham and a villainy. What is the use of praising it?

Let us consider its alleged advantages. It enables a man to go very quickly from one place to another. If a man is happy he may just as well stay where he is, and

if he is unhappy all places are equally beastly to him. But let us assume the absurdity that it is a good thing merely to see a lot of places, and then mark the shallow humbug of the pretension of our civilization. A man goes from place A to place B at a mile a minute and sees nothing but a headaching whirl of scenery all the way. In the old days he would have seen all the towns and villages between A and B. Go to. Again, our civilization enables us to send news very rapidly by the telegraph. If it also ensured that most news was good news that would be all very well, but the contrary is proverbially the case—"No news is good news" is one of the very few sensible proverbs I know—and so the result is simply to curtail our periods of negative happiness. Go to, again. What

else is there? The diffusion of education? It substitutes for a healthy interest in natural objects a vicious taste for the vapid concoctions of muddle-headed journalists and idiotic novelists. At present, that is to say, and I don't believe much in the future.

It has eradicated the savage vices, cruelty and so on? Now, kindly turn to a file of any newspaper of a few months since and read the accounts of what the "civilized" troops did in China. Thank you. In so far as it has eradicated the savage vices in their obvious form, it has simply driven them in to appear in viler forms: gloating over the miseries of criminals in the dock and all that. (There used to be a charming lady who sketched them very prettily.) And even when it *does* make people humane, if those

people go to war their humanity simply lengthens it out, and causes much more misery in the long run. It's an evil all round.

So much for its virtues: I wish to be fair and give it a chance. Directly to indict its vices would require a library. Speaking roughly—rather roughly—it produces innumerable thousands of overworked and discontented people, and a few thousands of vulgar, bored ones. It is killing poetry, painting, romance, the joy of life. It props up the incapable and the vicious, and keeps the capable and wholesome—look at me!—jolly well down. And the worst of it is that there is nothing to be done. Violence simply plays into the hands of its worst elements. And nobody listens if you write about it. Well, I have schooled myself to endure it,

but it does make me savage when I hear of its "blessings."

Yes, and not content with this hypocritical eulogy, we must needs—in an unscrupulous frenzy of self-justification—go and foist it on to happier people who have so far escaped it. I won't speak of China. There we were simply in the position of savages using superior force to murder people in many essentials far more civilized than ourselves, and except in so far as we murder them we can make no lasting impression. But take the uncivilized. I read some time ago in the *Times* of some people somewhere or other who practised slavery. The slaves formed a sociable little community of their own; every man of them had a house; they worked very few hours a day, and were well fed and light-hearted. All this was

admitted. Well, we must needs go in our cursed meddlesome manner and attempt to destroy this "abominable system" and replace it by "the blessings of civilization." The blessings of civilization and freedom meant that the emancipated slave became an outcast from his friends and relations, was seized on by the sweater in the nearest town, and was worked to death, after falling into all sorts of moral degradation. The report went on to say that the slaves were unaccountably slow to appreciate these blessings, but that we were doing our best to put an end to their obstinacy, were punishing their masters as far as possible, and so on. It may be the case that our missionaries and their backers argue that as our civilization is an unmitigated failure with ourselves it may

possibly be a success with men of a different race and in a different climate. But imagine the folly and cruelty of proceeding—on this very off-chance—to interfere with people demonstrably happy as they are. I protest that not all the wars and famines and injustices and tyrannies of barbarism have worked a tithe of the evil that this infernal——

But I'm afraid of saying something harsh if I go on.

# III

# WORK

## III

### WORK

WHAT bends the labourer's back? Work. What pales the artisan's cheek? Work. What narrows the factory girl's chest? Work. What makes a man prematurely old? Work. What makes him irritable and quarrel with his wife? Work. What makes him see next to nothing of his children? Work. What keeps him ignorant of life and art? Work. . . . I could ask such questions and return the same answer for ever, and in the face of all this people have the effrontery to go up and down

praising this aboriginal curse, saying it makes rest sweet, that it comforts sorrow, and that it does a hundred other things to benefit humanity. I am not quite sure whether this patently false and ridiculous idea was started by a cunning sweater or invented by labouring humanity to cheat its wretchedness. In the latter case it may be a wise imposture. But an imposture it is, and it has to be exposed.

When you are so utterly worn out with physical toil that you cannot stand, there is a negative satisfaction in lying down, but to call it enjoyment is nonsense. Your bones ache, and you toss wearily from side to side. If your toil has been mental it is odds you have a headache and your nerves are all quivering, and is rest then sweet? You are haunted by sudden recollections of work imperfectly

performed, and by anticipations of work, after a brief space, to be performed again. Rest, indeed! The exhausted brain-worker climbs mountains or rows long distances, not because he is an idiot, but because his nerves won't let him rest. A deceased statesman used to spend his shorter holidays in bed. But did he rest? Not he; he used to read scientific books, one after the other, to keep his brain off the problems of his working life. The only men who can rest are the people who can rest as much as they like. Observe a week-end party on the lawn of a country house on Sunday afternoon. The man who has to be back at work on Monday sits restlessly, his head full of melancholy because the pretty picture is so fleeting, his brows puckered with past and future cares. But the man who is

going to stay all the week and after that go on to idle elsewhere sits with a placid smile on his fat face and his hands folded on his bulging waistcoat, the beast! Very likely he will turn to the other man and lament that he has no work in the world, the infernal hypocrite!

Then work as a cure for sorrow. There may be possibly some satisfaction in breaking stones or cutting down trees if you have suffered a blow in your affections, but as for work that requires thought, originality, or delicacy, it simply rubs the sorrow in. It makes the nerves all the readier to be jarred, and it exhausts the strength which might make the sorrow tolerable. And there is the additional worry from the work being ill done, as it certainly will be. It is pretty to hear some comfortable, luxurious

woman, who never did a stroke of work in her life, assuring some emotionally harassed man, with a sweet sympathy, that there is nothing like work to comfort him. I should like to give her twelve hours a day on the treadmill.

The dignity of labour! That piece of cant, I am quite certain, was invented by an employer of labour as a cheap consolation for his slaves. There is dignity in lying on the turf, at one with the sky and the sun; there is no dignity in sweating over it with a spade. All the instincts of our nature are against this humbug. The beasts do not work if they can help it, nor does the savage, and civilized man always makes others work for him if he can. What dignity is there in bending over a desk all day for a pittance and for the benefit of

a capitalist who is enjoying himself in the sun?

But what keeps a man young and hearty? Idleness. What preserves his digestion and his temper? Idleness. What enables him to be a friend to his children and watch their growth? Idleness. Why can he travel? Because he has no work to do. When can he cultivate his mind and enjoy the best in literature and art? When he has no work. When does he live? When he is idle.

You can take your musty bundle of silly saws about work and throw it in the fire. Then go and work, if you must, with a right understanding of your handicap. But if you take my advice, you'll be either a man of independent means or a tramp.

# IV

# THE EDUCATION OF A GENTLEMAN

## IV

### THE EDUCATION OF A GENTLEMAN

WHEN I read or hear complaints that in our public schools—I mean Eton and Harrow and their more or less successful imitators—Latin and Greek are taught to the exclusion of modern languages and other more obviously useful subjects, I often long to catch the eye of a headmaster. I should wink at him, and if he had any humour about him he would wink back at me. *We* should see the joke. It is a good fine fruity joke. For years and years people who knew nothing about the matter have thought,

and people who knew something have pretended to think, that our boys have been amassing stores of classical learning, and the critics have shouted themselves hoarse over the alleged waste of time. And all the while the real experts have known quite well that the dispute is all about the reflection of a shadow. Latin and Greek are not taught in our public schools. What, then, *is* taught? Nothing, dear paterfamilias, nothing at all.

Next to our legal system, the education of the males belonging to the comfortable classes of this country is the most beautifully-organized swindle the world has ever seen. If Latin and Greek were really taught I should have nothing to say against it. Really to understand modern languages or the classics of our own literature you must know something of Latin

and Greek, and if education is to be "liberal" it must comprehend more than something of that knowledge. But the amount of Latin and Greek taught to the average boy in a public school might be taught him—yes, him, the average boy—in a year at the outside and leave heaps of time for heaps of other subjects. As it is—partly because the teachers have no idea how to teach, and partly because their sloth makes them continue in a mazy, muddled tradition—the boys learn neither Latin nor anything else. See how the confidence trick works. Paterfamilias, having been taught nothing himself, cannot as a rule detect the deceit practised on him to the effect that things are much better than they were in his day. Every now and then, however, he is sharp enough to smell a rat; and then

the schoolmaster falls back on his famous excuse, the brazen impudence of which might be a lesson to paterfamilias in human cheek and human stupidity, and so some small return for his money. "It's not," quoth the schoolmaster, "what the boy learns in school, but what he learns out of school that is really important." Think of it! You pay £200 a year or so for your son to be educated, and are expected to be satisfied with the education in games he and the other boys can organize for themselves. It is wonderful.

The true reason why such a palpable trick succeeds is that most parents care very little whether their sons are taught anything or nothing; all they want is that the little snobs can say in after-life that they were at a public school. Boys

are not snobs? That's another silly delusion which I may as well slaughter by the way. Boys are worse snobs than their elders, because the instinctive passion of their souls is uncorrected by experience. "Brown's an awfully nice chap. His people live in Eaton Square." *I* know them. Even if parents became zealous about education, they could still be fobbed off with humbug, of course. It's like beer. Few people know good beer from bad; bad costs less to produce, and so bad is sold. It makes me sick—I mean the stupidity. The teachers in our Board Schools—which, I believe, are extremely bad—have at least to go through a course of learning to teach; in our other public schools it is enough if they like open-air games.

As for the University, I might leave it

to Gibbon, except for the current opinion that it has been altogether transformed since Gibbon's time. That also is vanity. I admit that the "men" who read for Honours are told of useful books to read, and if they were not reading for examinations, which is no reading at all, they might pick up a few ideas. But as for the "passmen," poodle dogs are taught more difficult tricks every day than anything *they* have to do. They learn parrot-wise the translation of a few easy Latin books, and if they do not mistake too many passages they become Bachelors of Arts. Then, if they are fools enough to throw away a little more money, they become Masters of Arts without any further trouble. Then, too, we hear of the benefits to be gained apart from book-learning. Bunkum! Are there no rivers

where boats can be propelled, no fields where balls can be knocked about, save at Oxford and Cambridge? As for social intercourse, undergraduates fall into sets and coteries, for the most part, of a sort similar to what they would fall into at home. A few make acquaintances of a class superior, in the snob's view, to their own. There's a glorious result for you! And, at the end of it all, the man with the education of a gentleman faces life at twenty-four or so with a head full (it won't hold much) of silly, narrow-minded prejudices, and a phrase or two of Latin which he most vilely mispronounces. I keep calm with difficulty.

# V

# FRIENDS

## V

### FRIENDS

EVER since men formed themselves into social groups friends have been a by-word. The Arab Sheik, as it is now the fashion to call Job, the Greek dramatist, and satirists of all countries and ages have observed their hypocrisy and heartlessness. That we should deal with our friends remembering that they may one day be our enemies, is one of the most useful maxims bequeathed us by the ancients. An English playwright has put the matter pithily. "My friend? I am very poor and thou canst not borrow money of

me. I am unmarried. . . . Then what employment have I for a friend?" But all this is common form. That a man's friends will use him in his prosperity and desert him in his adversity, and that if he offend them they will become the most malignant of his foes, is the ordinary experience of humanity, and a philosopher will expect it. What complicates the matter and makes it infinitely worse is that your infernal friends are ashamed of this nature of theirs and attempt to conceal it—at your expense. For an example. Some years ago a well-known man, with a host of friends, came to sudden grief. He was, in fact, disgraced. Well, his friends deserted him, of course. That was to be expected, and no doubt he was not surprised, and in this particular case they had a good excuse: it required more

than ordinary courage to stand by him. But were they content to stand apart? Not they. They rushed about explaining that they *would* have befriended him to the last in their nobility of soul, only that they had discovered that the case was so *very* bad, much worse than people knew. They did all they could, in fact, to damage him. "We are such splendid fellows," said they in effect, "that even this disgrace would not prevent our standing by our friend, if it were only what has appeared—but we have private knowledge: it is really impossible."

It is this vanity of friends which makes them such a pest. It is one of the many bad results of the impossible theories of conduct prevalent among men. Man is a rascal, and if he would only admit it he would do far less harm. It is in pre-

tending to be a saint that he does most of his mischief. Sometimes your friends will not only exaggerate your fault, as in the foregoing instance, but utterly misrepresent it, as in that which follows, and still out of vanity. A man is "broke," let us say, and can no longer make his old appearance in the world, or live as his friends live. Of course they drop him. But they won't admit the true reason, though nobody but a fool would have expected them to act otherwise. They find a multitude of hitherto undiscovered faults and vices in him, and give *these* as the reason. Ugh! An acquaintance of mine in this condition, to save his friends the trouble of avoiding him, buried himself in an obscure village. It happened that his luck turned, and when he reappeared in London he found that

there was no known vice or misconduct which had not been imputed to him. Not a friend, of course, had written to tell him so. The exile who expects letters from his friends is rather pathetically ignorant.

Another less frequently noticed drawback in having friends is that if a man is given a post or preferment they insist hotly that he is unworthy of it. One I knew was given a rather high position in official life unexpectedly. The world at large was a little surprised, but was willing to wait and give him a chance of justifying the choice. Not so his friends: they were furious. "What, *Jones?* Oh, nonsense! It's impossible. I've known him for years. Of course he's a very decent fellow, but as for being fit to," etc., etc. Impartial people were influenced.

" Yes, it is an odd appointment. I don't know the man, but Smith, who's one of his oldest friends, tells me he drinks."

This sentiment did not, of course, prevent Jones's friends from swarming round him with requests for every service which his position did or did not make him competent to perform for them. They congratulated him with little ironical smiles, which must have made things very pleasant and comfortable for Jones.

Dear creatures! They run down our achievements and misrepresent our characters and repeat our unguarded remarks, and when we die they say it was all for the best. ·001 of them are different, but these should be called by another name. The usual one means so much to us.

# VI

# THE PROBLEM OF THE RICH

## VI

### THE PROBLEM OF THE RICH

WHAT are we to do with our rich? Something must really be done at once. We can't possibly go on seeing our beautiful country-sides and decent streets ruined by monstrous new houses, having the purchasing powers of our small incomes invaded by vulgar standards of living, deteriorating in our taste from the contemplation of coarse luxuries and brutal displays—we can't go on suffering all this and getting in return merely the spectacle of unattractive appearances and bad manners. Something must be done.

The thing has come to a climax. Even fifty years ago there was no such problem: it was solved by the absorption of these people into the aristocracy, and the imposition on them of a standard of life and manners set by a superior class. I don't say the manners were very good, and of course the aristocracy, from the point of view of pedigree and heraldry, was by that time almost entirely ridiculous. Still, there was a tradition of dignity and reserve and courtesy. But now-a-days the aristocracy, such as it is, is impoverished and the fortunes of the new men have grown enormously in number and size, and the result is that the old authority is upset. The modern rich stick to their natural manners and attitude towards life and their fellow-creatures, and more often impose them on their

aristocratic friends than the other way. It is notorious.

I hope no ass of a reader will think I am a snob. Prejudice against trade is a silly modern idea, the invention of people who have nothing else in life to pride themselves upon but the magnificent circumstance that their fathers were parsons or lawyers. But the fact remains that if a man does not start by being a gentleman the pursuit of trade is not likely to make him one. Is it? At the best, trade is a process of trying to buy things for less than their worth and to sell them at more; it is really not a refining occupation. And a great many modern fortunes have been made by downright robbery. Moreover, to dispose of a large fortune satisfactorily without any guide of tradition means that its possessor

should be a sensible and large-minded man, and you can only expect that of one in a million.

Very well, then. Here are all these enormously rich people, who have got their wealth in the immediate past—probably dishonestly—who are uncontrolled by any authority or tradition, and who talk and act just as they please. What is the result? Vulgar display I have already mentioned. In this matter I dare say the women are more to blame than the men. In fact the female side of the question is especially exasperating to me. In our present stage of civilization a certain number of women must be merely ornamental. Good, provided that they really are ornamental. If a woman is a charming hostess and sweetens social life, even if she is only beautiful, I have no-

thing to say against thousands a year being spent on her silly dresses. But when a woman is stupid, ignorant, ill-mannered, ill-natured, and ugly as well, it does annoy me that she should flaunt priceless jewels at the opera and have a new hat from Paris every week. I hate the sight of these women bustling authoritatively about Bond Street in the morning and talking in loud voices all through a play. I leave London in the season to avoid the sight of them.

Another evil of these rich people is that they have run up the prices of restaurants and such places to such an extent that it is almost impossible to procure decent meals at a fair price. But these are trifles compared with other evils they bring upon us. Look at the increasing badness of our manners. It is all very well to

say we can avoid them, but we can't all be dukes with large country places to bury ourselves in. Sets and societies in London run into one another, and you can never be sure of not meeting some boorish brute who is there—indirectly, it may be—because he or his father is a rich man. And, mark you, he is boorish because he no longer imitates his betters; he feels himself cock of the walk. I suppose you'll tell me that it is all right in the next generation. I don't like to contradict you, but you're utterly wrong. Perhaps it used to be. But now-a-days the next generation swaggers much more than the first. It has learned nothing at its school and university but a contempt for intellect. It lives a round of vulgar pleasures which it enjoys with the grace of a dog gnawing a bone.

Of course there are exceptions—don't interrupt.

But enough of manners. These plutocrats debauch the very souls of the community. Their monopolies and the difficulties they make for poorer people have enormously increased that weak-spirited and disgusting reverence for wealth which is only too natural to feeble humanity. The most convincing proof of this is the hypocritical assumption that the old type of *nouveau riche* is extinct and that your modern plutocrat is a gentlemanly, modest fellow who is rightly welcomed wherever he goes. Everybody knows this is all humbug. He may be changed in a few superficial particulars, but he is just as pretentious, mean, and purse-proud as he ever was. But nobody dares to say so. Even the comic papers, which once

existed to satirize him, now reverently leave him alone—the snobs!—and only laugh, in an anachronistical way, at the alleged ignorance of servants and labourers. It makes one ill to read them.

Well, what *is* to be done? My idea is to start a Government Department with a staff of social missionaries, who should be imposed on the plutocrats whether they like it or not. Why not? We do it to the Chinese, and we have admitted the principle of compulsory education. The missionary, who would take the place of the existing parasite, and indeed be a kind of good, independent parasite, would instil honesty and modesty into the plutocrat, accompany the plutocrat's wife on her shopping, and teach her to be polite to the shop people, lead the

conversation at meals to cultivated topics, and so on. There would be a periodical examination for the plutocrat and all his family, and fines from unsuccessful plutocrats would be handed over to successful missionaries. What good might not be done by a highly-educated, nicely-mannered, and kind but firm missionary! It a little soothes my anger to contemplate the career.

# VII

# MONEY

## VII

### MONEY

TALKING about the rich, I may as well add a complaint or two about money itself. I don't blame the rich people for *being* rich. I believe they can't help it. True that they may do horribly nefarious things to get rich, and these things may have a bad effect on their characters—or would have if their characters were not generally as objectionable as possible to start with. But I believe that it is not these base actions which procure their wealth. It comes of its own accord; it would come

anyhow. Some people are born to be rich, some poor. I happen to be of the latter category: however hard I work, I never get any money for it, so to speak. I don't complain of *that*. Lots of us—Milton and so on—have been in the same boat. What I do complain of is that this should be made a reproach to me. Nobody understands money. Even in its superficial aspects, imports and exports, free trade and protection, and the like, the experts contradict one another on the most elementary points. Money is a mysterious thing, which comes to this man and stays away from that in a manner absolutely unintelligible to our finite minds. There is no apparent system about it: you may be quite sordid and absolutely unscrupulous and still remain poor. To blame a man for

being poor is like blaming him for being short or thin. But my asses of acquaintances do nothing else. "It's quite absurd," they say. "Look at Snooks and Jenkins and Bumblecombe. *They* make money; why can't you?" I am generally too angry to answer, and the great bloated blockheads go on to point out that I am no longer a young man, that I owe something to my family, and all that. It is not so much the heartlessness and ill-breeding of these friends that annoy me as their unspeakable fatuity. As though I could help it! As though I wouldn't be rich—decently, not vulgarly rich—if I could! Pity that I should be among the unfortunate and timely helpfulness are what is needed, not unreasonable reproach. But people insist that one has no right to be

poor; they might as well say one has no right to be killed by a tiger if it attacks one. As though anybody claimed such a right! The income-tax people, even, refuse to allow for the unfortunate attitude of money towards one—that is the really scientific way of putting it. They tax one at the rate of about fifteen shillings in the pound, and simply refuse to believe the true state of affairs.

Another point about money is that, even in the smallest amounts, it refuses to stay with some people. One of the few people who have said anything sensible about it is Mr. Meredith's Richmond Roy, who remarked to his son that although every one was aware of this peculiarity of money, no one allowed for it in the particular instance.

They won't. With some people, however careful they are, money will not stay. It is really true that it makes wings to itself. No; I'm not attempting a trite joke at all; I mean what I say. I am ready to swear that at times when I have "watched every penny," money has departed from me absolutely without my knowledge. I may have consciously spent a sovereign: I find that thirty shillings are gone, and though my memory holds every detail of the day no cause is forthcoming. With other people money stays. I would wager that if C. and I started the day with the same amount of it in our pockets and did precisely the same things all day long, in the evening he would have left twice as much as I. It is a mystery insoluble by humanity in our

present stage of knowledge. But here again your fat-headed moralist, ignoring the real fact, which he less than anybody is fitted to understand, starts criticizing and rebuking. As though men had no better use for the gift of articulate speech than to assist fate in its unmerited persecutions! It is a very ugly side of human nature—ignorance, cruelty, and hypocrisy all at once. I should not mind being poor if I were spared this painful spectacle. But my poverty has such a horrible effect on others.

# VIII

# THE MAN OF BUSINESS

## VIII

### THE MAN OF BUSINESS

HE is the great fraud of the age. I say "the great" fraud, partly because he is the most fraudulent fraud and partly because he is also the ideal of the age, its court of appeal, the one person who is always spoken and written of with respect. He represents the kind of life it most approves, a life without imagination or kindliness or any sort of grace, and when he is successful his success is of the kind it most appreciates. So far he is not a fraud. The age admires monotonous

money-grubbing as a pursuit, and he is a monotonous money-grub: it thinks a heap of money, without regard to any wisdom or good taste in its use, the most glorious achievement of man, and a heap of money the successful business man duly presents to its mind's eye as a fact. So far so good: the age and its ideal are well met, and will be comfortably damned in good faith together. But where the age is deceived is in believing that the man of business is a remarkably sharp fellow, full of common-sense, attentive to details, and never making a mistake. That is all a delusion. It arises probably from a false notion of money. Money is not a thing to be hunted and caught. It is a divinity, a great unseen power, which chooses this or that wor-

shipper for reward or punishment, and the principle, if there be one, of its choice is unknown to mankind. Certainly money does not necessarily choose the quick-witted for reward—far from it. You may ascertain that fact in half-an-hour's conversation with any very successful man of business you like to take for an example. You will find him ignorant, to begin with, not only of books and art and all that—as to which, it might fairly be said that he has had no time for studying them, and is in the same boat as most of his fellow-countrymen—but of such common circumstances of life as would have been forced on the notice of any but the crassest intelligence. I can think of a hundred instances of this, but they would all sound incredible. You will next perceive that

he is incapable of following the simplest argument. "What I say is, A is B," quoth the man of business. You give reasons for believing that A is not B, simple reasons expressed so far as possible in words of one syllable. He looks at you with the same expression as that a dog would wear if you showed it a page of Hegel, and repeats: "What I say is, A is B." In some muddled inarticulate way he probably believes that if he did not think A was B he would not be so rich. And on his emotional side you will find him the victim of the silliest sentimentality; observe him at the theatre and when he reads.

"Ah, but," say you, "take him on his own ground." Well, take him on it. Have you ever left anything to the dis-

cretion of an agent? Or, if that be too severe a test, let us suppose you merely write your man of business a letter on some easy subject germane to his business, and use language intelligible to a baby. Your man of business puzzles over it for two or three days and then asks you to call on him. The aid of gesture, facial expression, and continued reiteration is necessary before the poor fellow can understand you. Or suppose that he is a creditor and you a debtor. "I must ask you to send a cheque by return," writes he. You: "I have no money." Back comes his reply: "I must ask you to send a cheque by return." Either he cannot take in your remark or believes a cheque to be valuable apart from the financial position of the drawer of it.

Many a poor debtor who would not have minded any quantity of abuse has been driven mad by this immovable assumption that he is merely obstinate.

As for attention to details, you can never rely on your man of business to address a letter without a mistake. It is some years since I left a house I used to inhabit, and the majority of my business letters, though the writers or their employers have had the new address sent them printed a hundred times, still go to the old. Gradually, and after many mistakes as to the postal town, county, and so forth of the new address, some are beginning to come direct. Put it on to the clerks; but if your man of business, with his "organizing ability," cannot get a clerk who can copy down a simple

address without a mistake, what are we to think of his standard of efficiency? But he is a delusion all round, my dear friend. He belongs to the stupidest portion of a stupid race, and his money has nothing to do with his personal qualities. Kick him off his pedestal.

# IX

# DOCTORS

## IX

### DOCTORS

I DO not complain of any individual doctor for knowing little about the health of humanity; such a science cannot be perfected by one man, and it is the fault of his predecessors, not his, that the human body is still the subject of foolish superstitions and has yielded so few of its secrets. I do not complain that he can only make a guess at the nature of my illness, that his guess is probably wrong, and that the digusting medicines and tedious habits he imposes on me probably do me more harm than good.

I am resigned to all that. But what makes me perfectly furious is that this humbug of a doctor pretends all the time that he knows certainly and absolutely both what is the matter with me and what will cure me. It is this insult to my intelligence that exasperates me. The history of the humbug is obvious. In days of old your doctor, your medicine man, was also a priest, who had to pretend to infallibility to preserve his authority with his savage tribesmen, and down to the present day the great majority of his patients look on his craft as a sort of sacred mystery, and would be alarmed if he confessed any doubt. Well and good; they are practically savages in their mental constitution, and the medicine man has to humbug them. They would mistrust his skill if he did not pretend

to this absurd certainty of knowledge, his practice would be lost, and the little good they might possibly take from him would be lost also. Well and good; it is a sinful world, and most men practise one way or another on the folly of their fellows; I do not blame the doctor in a general way at all.

But what does he mean by trying to palm this imposture off on *me?* How dare he pretend that his empirical guesses about *my* complaints are reasoned truth? But he does dare, every time. As a general rule the little he does really know about me I knew already. Once, for example, when I had the influenza I called in a fellow who solemnly told me that my feeling feverish "meant a high temperature." He paraphrased a few more of my remarks, and then told me with an *ex cathedrâ* air that I had gastric catarrh

—or some other complaint of which I was as innocent as a babe. I knew a man who had a weak heart—as it afterwards turned out—but who was treated by a doctor for a "sluggish liver" for years, made to run up and down stairs, ride frisky horses, and do everything else that was nearly fatal to his real trouble. The doctor, mark you, did not say he *thought* my friend had a sluggish liver; he said my friend *had* a sluggish liver, and my fool of a friend was taken in by the lying assurance.

Then there is "the etiquette of the profession," which simply means that doctors think it more important to back one another up in their deception than to save the lives of his Majesty's lieges. If a doctor is killing you with his ignorance, and a second doctor is aware of it, the

chances are that "etiquette" will prevent the second man interfering; it is better, you understand, that you should die than that the doctor's claim to omniscience in his profession should be exposed. Pleasant, is it not?

As for the innumerable and contradictory fads of doctors about diet and all that, I presume they are all part of the swindle. The doctors must say something, must make some alteration in your habits, otherwise, they think, you would grudge your guinea. These fads are quite arbitrary, of course; a fashion in them is kept up for a time to affect an air of consistency, and then it is replaced by another in order that you may marvel at the progress of the science. So at one time gouty men are forbidden to drink port, at another time encouraged, and so on. In my

opinion the most harmful of them all is the persistent exhortation to give up good wine and drink whisky with your meals: it is pathetic to me to look round a club dining-room and see men poisoning themselves so horribly—but that is by the way. The ridiculous orders to go to some particular place rather than another exactly like it I trust are part of a corrupt bargain with town councils, and not downright idiocy.

Some doctors charge you according to their idea of your wealth and position in life. I don't object to the principle. It reminds one of Robin Hood, and that sort of thing. The annoying thing about it is that doctors go by such silly criteria. Dress, for example. Every one must have a new coat some time or other, but if you go in a new coat to one of these doctors

who have a scale of charges, however poor you are he charges you his maximum. It never occurs to the fool that a poor man often has to dress well to keep up his credit, and that millionaires are notoriously shabby. If he goes in for a scale of charges it might, surely, by this time of day be put on a reasonable system—the production of your last income-tax receipt, or application therefore, or the last order committing you to prison for not paying a debt.

But really the whole medical profession reeks of its origin, of the savage medicine man with his incantations and theory of inspiration. I have nothing to say against the devoted men who give their lives to succour suffering humanity and so forth. I only know they can't cure my cold in the head.

# X

# EDITORS

## X

### EDITORS

FEW things irritate me so much as one of those drivelling articles or essays I see from time to time about editors—"my various editors" and such-like—crediting the brutes with all sorts of virtues, kindness and helpfulness to beginners, keenness to discover fresh talent and Heaven knows what. It is all rot and bunkum, and is probably done with some base motive.

I will tell you the sort of men editors really are—women editors exist, but I have never had anything to do with

them, and my imagination refuses to picture them. An editor—there are a few exceptions, I admit—is a man who is chosen for his post partly for lack of intellect and partly for lack of moral scruples. He must be stupid, in the first place, as a guarantee that he will let nothing clever get into the paper—oh, yes, there are exceptions, of course. Proprietors of newspapers, like theatrical managers, are morbidly afraid of being "above the heads" of the public. They themselves are generally far below the average intelligence of their countrymen, and they judge by themselves. Consequently they seek for editors of obvious and acknowledged stupidity, knowing that stupid people shrink from cleverness and are prejudiced against it. It is necessary that editors should be unscrupulous,

to lend themselves to vile complots with proprietors to underpay their contributors —no, I don't mean that, because most of the contributors are worth nothing at all —I mean—at any rate, they are uncrupulous ruffians; you can see it in their furtive glances, like hunted animals, when you go to beard them in their lairs.

Kindness and helpfulness to beginners? Fudge. The keenest delight an editor knows is to torture and mortify beginners. He was kicked once himself, and he loves to pass the kicks on. It is human nature, and an editor is merely a bad specimen of humanity, after all. When an editor receives a contribution from a beginner he grins and gloats; he knows the misery of waiting he can inflict, and the thought rejoices his evil mind. After a few months of waiting, perhaps the beginner may be

fool enough to begin to call. Every time his name is taken in the editor laughs aloud with glee. On the two-hundredth call the editor consents to see the beginner, to gloat over the misery of his face and obvious destitution. The editor then gives himself absurd airs of importance and says he has had no time to read the contribution. Eventually it is returned or destroyed. I was present once when an editor received the news that a beginner, worn out with waiting, had committed suicide. The editor immediately had a glass of sherry and a biscuit. Of course editors won't help beginners. They prefer their papers to be written by those of their relations who are incapable of any honest work; you can see it for yourself.

For the same reason, if an editor is sharp enough to detect fresh talent—

which he very seldom is—he ruthlessly suppresses it. I have invited you to look at me before, but I should be obliged if you would again. Isn't it monstrous? There is the public, or at any rate a portion of it, bored to death with its idiotic newspapers, simply dying for brilliant articles and causeries and columns and what not; here am I, and there, in between, are those stupid, malevolent, unscrupulous, grinning fiends of editors. The Press, as we all know, is ruining this unhappy country, vulgarizing its taste, poisoning its morals, doing all kinds of devilish things to it. There is hardly an editor in London on whom I have not impressed this fact, mentioning at the same time an obvious remedy, and the brutes are not even interested. There's another thing. These asses who write in

praise of editors always trumpet their "courtesy." The courtesy of an editor! Angry as I am, I can't help laughing. I have known an editor, with whom I was closeted, ring a bell and say, "Tell Mr. So-and-so I'll see him in two minutes." He didn't even apologize.

Those articles about editors, again, always convey an insidious suggestion that they are immensely important persons. That particularly annoys me. I know they think they are, and I take good care to let them see I don't agree with them. Naturally polite to everybody, equals and inferiors alike, I can't help treating editors *de haut en bas.* They have only themselves to blame. Why should a man who runs some silly noxious newspaper give himself airs any more than the driver of an evil-smelling

motor-car? I can't stand conceit and presumption, and I won't have it. Knowing their total unfitness for their position, I will not kow-tow to them. I hope I have impressed that on you sufficiently.

# XI

# OUR FOOD AND DRINK

## XI

### OUR FOOD AND DRINK

IT is really a wonder we survive. So far as our food is concerned, it is true that we seldom eat very active poison. We do sometimes; bad oysters, for example, and things out of tins. But our food, if not actively poisonous, is of a sort to disturb immediately and ultimately to ruin our digestions. If we spend much money on it we are given meat of a bad quality disguised in rich and noxious sauces. If we spend little, we get better meat, but it is offensively bungled in the cooking. Over-rich cooking destroys

the wealthy, merely stupid cooking the poor. The well-cooked fare of our forefathers can no longer be procured; "open ranges," it seems, are too much trouble for our cooks. The average cost of a meal is far greater than what it was, and its value far less. I suppose it is progress. Go to an ordinary hotel. You simply can't get a decent, wholesome dinner, a well-cooked steak or chop. You are fobbed off with a pretentious *table d'hôte*, consisting of a tasteless thin soup, a piece of stale whiting, a stringy cutlet smothered in anchovy sauce or some other filthy concoction, and a piece of sodden chicken with a "salad" consisting of a weather-beaten lettuce and a little bit of rotten egg. For this you are charged the price of several pounds of wholesome beef. And you are thought vulgar if you swear

at the head waiter. Of course there are still places where it is possible to get sound food, and a few rich men and women know enough about it not to be taken in by their servants. But it may be safely said that the majority of meals eaten by the majority of people in this country are neither satisfying nor wholesome. They are by far the most important thing in life, and the art of cookery—up to the point of agreeable wholesomeness—is quite simple. It is only at a great cost that an elaborate dinner can be really good, but people might procure, with sense and a little trouble, excellent plain fare for a comparatively small cost. But no: everybody must aim at an appearance of living elaborately, and so dinner-parties, hotel dinners, club dinners, and so on, are for

the most part deleterious and objectionable. We are sacrificed in hecatombs on the altar of vulgar display, and asses, fools, idiots, and imbeciles talk of the spread of material comfort!

But this is a trifling grievance compared with our drink. We—we wretches of moderate incomes, at any rate—drink rank virulent poison every day. We are thirsty, and ask for a simple glass of beer; we are given a devilish compound which shall increase and not assuage our thirst, and which incidentally destroys the coatings of our stomachs. The arsenic trick has been exposed; whether strychnine is used now or not I do not know. We want a bottle of pure light claret to our dinner; we pay therefor about sixteen times what it costs to produce a bottle of pure light claret, and we are supplied with a liquid

consisting chiefly of sulphuric acid and poisonous colouring-matter. Plain water is known to be unsafe, and the disgusting mixtures called "Temperance drinks" are not for a polite pen. You can drink fusil oil or some such stuff and call it whisky if you like. Now, mark me attentively. There is absolutely no necessity for all this wickedness. It is partly sheer imbecility and partly love of evil for its own sake. I suppose it pleases a wine-merchant to reflect that he is a murderer on a large scale; it flatters his vanity. For it is quite possible to import perfectly pure French wine, sell it at about eighteen-pence a quart, and still make a hundred per cent. profit. I should not be at all surprised to hear that there would be a better profit than on the chemist's horror we drink at present. Homicidal passion,

then, is one cause. But another is that the average drinker despises a wine unless it has a strong taste, gets quickly into his head, and makes him ill the next day. That, I believe, is also the case with beer. Brewers complain, with tears in their eyes, that people would not drink good honest malt-and-hops beer if they brewed it. It is possible that they speak the truth; you never know.

Well, but what on earth is the use of a Government if it is to allow a great nation to be poisoned before its eyes? I don't want to talk politics, but surely we pay enough for the great careers of Messrs. Bright and Cobden without dying like flies in a slavish adherence to their views on adulteration. The most extreme individualist grants that it is the duty of the Government to protect the bodies of

the lieges from assault; and can you have a worse kind of assault than this—on your stomach and your pocket at once? The fact is that, whichever side is in power, our Government is formed of persons who can afford to buy good wine at its present monstrous rates, and don't care whether I am poisoned or not. And I am afraid to change this state of things for fear of waking up some morning and finding my alcohol cut off altogether.

Then what is to be done? The Government is no use, purveyors of drink are incurably homicidal, and my fellow-drinkers are too hopelessly rabbit-brained to combine with me against this murderous injustice. I suppose I must go on being slowly done to death. I am full of gout, my memory is failing, and my temper (I am told) is not so perfect as it was.

Don't apologize. What with its ugliness, its false refinement, its stupidity, its dulness, its daily poison—its civilization, in fact—it is a delightful age. I am charmed to live in it.

# XII

# OUR CLOTHES

## XII

### OUR CLOTHES

I AM content to go on, as I said, without complaint. But I really must protest against the extraordinary and perverse combination of ugliness and discomfort with which I am compelled to clothe this poor poisoned body of mine. It is the complete absence of principle and reason about it which offends me. In days of old men dressed for the sake of appearance. It was rather absurd, because nearly all men are such undistinguished, ungainly animals that fine clothes merely increase their grotesqueness. Still, it

was a principle for which something was to be said. It was a gallant defiance of facts. Women act on it still, and I rather admire their courage. But men now have changed their theory altogether. We profess to dress for comfort and convenience. Comfort and convenience! Take a man walking the London streets in winter. He wears a hat, a great-coat, a coat, a waistcoat, a shirt, a collar, five studs (counting one for the back of the neck), a necktie, a vest, a pair of trousers, drawers, socks and boots—nineteen separate pieces of apparel, every one of which is capable of being an annoyance to him. I have forgotten his sleeve-links: twenty-one.

Now, all this is derived historically from the time when men dressed for appearance. Could anything be a more

glaring disproof of human intelligence? We have changed our theory; we wish to dress for comfort, not for show; but we are utterly incapable of fitting fact to the theory, utterly incapable of imagining a system of dress different from that of our ancestors, and therefore are content merely to achieve ugliness instead of prettiness, and leave the discomfort where it was. Let us be comfortable even if we have to be ugly, said we, and, lo! we manage to be ugly, and cannot by any travail of our minds manage to be comfortable. Upon my word, it almost defeats my natural optimism.

I am aware that there is still a lurking idea that a man may dress even in the contemporary mode with hope of beauty —but that is rather idiotic, isn't it? In a chimney-pot hat and frock-coat he looks,

as Diana said, like a smaller edition of the house he has left. In a cut-away coat he looks (especially if stout of figure) like an egg, and a bowler-hat is perhaps the most hideous object ever devised on this planet. But I will not pursue the painful catalogue. Few things distress me more than the sight of an average man, chinless, goggle-eyed, wobbly-nosed, and with an awkward gait, carefully dressed for effect in the modern fashion of coxcombry; I have turned down a side-street when one such has approached me. The most that can be said is that a shooting-suit—I mean with knickerbockers, of course—on a well-made man is inoffensive.

But regard the discomfort. When you dress there are twenty-one occasions for delay and misplacement and exasperation. I have known a man (it was not I) fling

a water-jug through his window in his fury before he had done. Twenty-one opportunities for what the French call the malice of things, but which I prefer to call their—but I hate strong language. Twenty-one opportunities for the powers of the air to distress a miserable mortal who, goodness knows, is beset enough without them. Then, when you are dressed, all day long until you fling the folly off at bedtime, in twenty-one places you may be maddened by tightness or looseness. Heavens! I forgot the braces. Twenty-two. If you go on a journey you have to take with you copies, from a dozen to two or three, of all these nuisances; if you forget one thing, you are undone, and become a beggar and a borrower. Then the expense. I know a man (again not myself) who owes

thousands of pounds to tailors and their brethren, and is almost literally in rags, and many a man has been insolvent all his life for no other reason. And if one is economical, one is always lacking some necessary thing; one's only pair of boots are suddenly incompetent, one freezes in winter, and dies of heat-exhaustion in summer.

It is too maddening to go into details, but just think for a moment of the cunning tortures implied in stiff linen into which pieces of metal have to be fitted, of stiff leather on one's feet, often bruising and excoriating one's flesh, and sometimes piercing it with nails, of heavy structures of felt on one's head, of collars which come unfastened—the tyranny and folly of it all! And what for? Not for beauty—we cannot cheat ourselves with *il faut*

*souffrir pour être beau ;* not for piety—we do not believe that we expiate our sins by such punishment of our flesh ; not for any conceivable reason, but just because we are too stupid to think of anything better.

The problem is so simple. All we require—but I don't see why I should bother to devise a comfortable dress. I should not be allowed to wear it.

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